

Change stance on Syria: Putin

Russia warns over preemptive Iran strike

AGENCIES

Russian President Vladimir Putin urged Western and Arab governments to review their policy on war-torn Syria on Thursday, as his foreign ministry warned US and Israel over any preemptive strike on Iran.

"Why should Russia be the only one reassessing its position? Perhaps our negotiating partners should reassess their position," Putin told Russia Today television.

"To us, the most important thing is to end the violence, to force all the sides in the conflict... to sit down at the negotiating table, determine the future and ensure the security of all the participants of the domestic political process," he said.

Putin has previously rejected providing asylum to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and insisted that it still viewed either him or his representatives as an integral part of the negotiating process.

Meanwhile, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov has starkly warned Israel and the United States against attacking Iran, saying Moscow sees no evidence that Tehran's nuclear programme is aimed at developing weapons.

"We warn those who are no strangers to military solutions ... that this would be harmful, literally disastrous for regional stability," Interfax quoted Ryabkov as saying.

An attack on Iran "would set off deep shocks in the security and economic spheres that would reverberate far beyond the



boundaries of the Middle East region," Ryabkov was quoted as saying.

Heightened Israeli rhetoric about the facilities, which Western powers believe are part of a programme to develop a nuclear weapons capability, has stoked speculation that Israel may attack Iran before the US presidential election in November.

Moscow has stirred Western and Arab world anger by vetoing three UN Security Council resolutions that would have slapped sanctions on Assad during the nearly 18-month conflict.

The interview comes amid efforts by Putin to repair a foreign policy image hurt by Russia's refusal to back calls for Assad to go amid bloodshed since March 2011 that monitors say has claimed as many as 26,000 lives.

The Russian foreign ministry, meanwhile, said it had full assurance that the chemical weapons stockpile amassed by the regime was safe and would not be used against Assad's foes.

On the ground, the two kidnapped brothers of a Syrian rebel commander were killed yesterday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said, as battles raged between rebels and army forces in several districts of the capital.

The Observatory also reported fierce battles and army shelling in Qadam in southern Damascus where anti-regime sentiments are strong.

A preliminary toll compiled by the Observatory said that at least 17 people were killed in violence across Syria yesterday a day after 176 people died.

Boat of illegal immigrants sinks; 58 killed

AFP, Ankara

Fifty-eight people drowned yesterday after a boat carrying illegal immigrants trying to reach Europe capsized in waters off western Turkey, the Anatolia news agency reported, citing a local official.

"The death toll from the accident is 58," said Ardahan Totuk, acting governor of Izmir province.

Forty-three bodies were recovered from the sea and 15 others were retrieved from the boat locker, he added.

The official said one more immigrant was rescued alive, bringing the number of survivors to 46 including two crew members -- the captain and his mate -- who were detained.

The boat hit the rocks after it left Ahmetbeyli on the western coast of Turkey close to Greek islands, Tahsin Kurtbeyoglu, a local official of Menderes district in Izmir province, told the private NTV television.

The nationalities of the immigrants including children were not immediately available, he noted, but said most of them were from Arab countries.

The boat's final destination was not known, but the number of its passengers was estimated to be 104, said Totuk, adding that the search and rescue operation was still continuing.

DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

Clinton master class boosts Obama

AFP, Charlotte

Bill Clinton told Americans on Wednesday that President Barack Obama had placed them on a path to renewed prosperity and deserved four more years to finish the job.

Lending his signature dazzle to Obama's re-election campaign, the two-term former president told the Democratic convention that he believed "with all my heart" that the 44th president had led a remarkable, if incomplete, recovery.

He said the man who defeated his wife for the Democratic nomination four years ago offers a better path forward for the country that will promote united values rather than the winner-takes-all mentality of Republicans.

Addressing a split electorate less than nine weeks ahead of November's election, Clinton said Obama had saved the economy from collapse and laid the foundation for the kind of growth seen during his own presidency in the 1990s.

"No president -- not me or any of my predecessors -- no one could have fully repaired all the damage he found in just four years," Clinton said.

"He has laid the foundations for a new, modern successful economy of shared prosperity, and if you will renew the president's contract, you will feel it. You will feel it."

After holding 15,000 of the Democratic faithful in Charlotte, North Carolina enthralled for over 45 minutes, Clinton was joined on stage by a smiling and energized Obama, leading to frenzied applause.

Obama was to address the convention yesterday at the same venue.



Early in his speech, Clinton formally nominated Obama as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate.

In a roll call Democrats from all 50 states one-by-one announced their support for Obama, officially handing him the party nomination.

Setting the context for that address, Clinton, who was president between 1993 and 2001, offered a point-by-point rebuttal of the policies of Obama's rival, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney.

"The most important question is, what kind of country do you want to live in?" he asked.

"If you want a you're-on-your-own, winner-take-all society, you should support the Republican ticket," he said, referring to Romney's vows to cut spending, ease regulations and reduce the size of government.

Early voting begins in US

AFP, Washington

Voters in 32 US states and the capital Washington were able to cast early ballots from yesterday ahead of the bitterly contested November presidential and legislative elections.

In the weeks to come, millions of voters across the United States will have the opportunity to cast ballots in nearly two-thirds of the country's 50 states, including the crucial battlegrounds of Florida, Colorado and Iowa.

According to analyst estimates, 40 percent of eligible American voters could go to the polls early, as compared with 33 percent who did so in 2008, when Obama swept into office over Republican nominee John McCain.

Robbers stab 3

FROM PAGE 20

around Tk 3.5 lakh and \$200 cash and cell phones from the flat, family members said.

As the gang members were fleeing, local people chased them and caught Sayeed, 28.

Beating up Sayeed, the mob handed him over to police.

The injured were Zafar Ullah Chowdhury, 60, the ex-deputy director who is now an expatriate in America, his nephew Jahangir Chowdhury, 47, and brother-in-law Parvez, 35.

Jahangir and Parvez were admitted to Dhaka Pongu Hospital while Zafar took treatment from Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Narrating the incident, Arshad Ali Mandal, a nephew of Zafar, said five robbers around 3:30am entered the flat on the second floor of a six-storey building at Senpara Parbata by cutting some grills.

They first entered Parvez's room and took him hostage, brandishing sharp weapons. They made Parvez to wake Zafar up. As Zafar opened the door, the robbers demanded the key of his almirah, Arshad said.

When Zafar resisted, they stabbed him in the hands and took away the cash from the almirah.

Later, the gang broke into Jahangir's room. They took gold ornaments of Zafar's sister-in-law and Jahangir's wife, holding their two children hostage.

Iftekhar Hossain, sub-inspector of Kafrul Police Station, said they had visited the spot, adding the robbers had climbed up a pipe to get into the flat.

"As the family members kept resisting the robbers, they also stabbed Jahangir and Parvez."

Hearing their cries, locals rushed to the spot but by that time all but Sayeed managed to climb down the pipe and fled.

Police recovered Tk 15,000 from the possession of the arrestee and a Molotov cocktail and a chapatti.

Zafar lives in the USA with his family and came to pay a visit to his relatives.

The officer-in-charge of the police station said they were investigating the incident.

No case was filed until filing of this report in the evening.

2 whistle-blowers

FROM PAGE 1

Towfikul Islam Tushar, 23, Mohorom Ali, 35, Joynal Abedin, 25, Md Mostafa, 26, and Md Mithu alias Prasanta, 22, were kidnapped in the evening on August 13 from a roadside tea stall in Savar.

Four days after the incident, Tushar's father Tajul Islam filed a case with Savar police mentioning that his son along with three friends was kidnapped by unknown people.

All the four families claimed that the kidnappers appeared to be law enforcers and that the incident occurred before a big crowd, many of whom later described it to them.

Intriguingly, 21 days after the incident, Rapid Action Battalion on September 3 announced arrest of the four youths along with two others in connection with "plotting" to kill three doctors.

Asked, Lt Col Ziaul Hasan, director of Intelligence Wing of Rab, denied the arrest of those four youths before September 2.

"Those youths might have gone into hiding sensing that Rab members were following them," he argued.

Tushar's father Tajul Islam said they went to file an abduction case, but the police did not record it

despite repeated requests.

"The police, however, recorded the case four days after the incident when different media reported on it," he added.

Expressing his concerns and surprise, Tajul said, "Though Rajib and Sabuj came forward to help us, they were arrested and are now in jail without committing any crime."

"The police have so far done nothing to rescue my son and his friends except arresting two of our well-wishers," alleged the aggrieved father.

Contacted, Sub-inspector Rakibul Islam of Savar Police Station, also the investigation officer of the case, said he arrested Rajib and Sabuj as the suspected abductors.

Rakibul claimed he arrested the duo on the request of the families of the four youths.

Asked, the SI said, "We tried to locate the missing youths by detecting their cellphones. But we could not make any headway as their cells remained switched off."

Md Asaduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Savar Police Station, said they have yet to reach a conclusion on the whereabouts of the four youths when they went missing.

War hero

FROM PAGE 20

the then Pakistani occupation army, including Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and his father Fazlul Quader Chowdhury.

Mahbub had information that Salauddin would attend a programme at Aziz's house and leave the place driving a car. But it was not Salauddin but his driver who was behind the wheel.

When the car came in sight, the freedom fighters hurled a grenade and opened fire. The driver was killed in the attack and Salauddin came out wounded.

During yesterday's cross-examination, defence counsel Ahsanul Huq Heena asked Mahbub if he had returned to Aziz's house after the operation.

Mahbub said he never went back to that house.

In reply to another question, he said he along with two to three freedom fighters had taken position [in a drain] under a slab, which was 10 to 12 feet high. They fired an energy rifle grenade at the car and opened fire from a 9mm SMG Mark-2 sten-gun.

"Did you hear any screaming from the car?" asked the defence counsel Ahsanul.

The witness replied in the negative. He, however, could not say how long the operation took to complete.

Ahsanul at one point suggested the tribunal that the witness had testified to create misunderstanding and chaos between BNP and his client.

"It is not true," was the witness' response.

Mentionable, Maj Ziaur Rahman founded the BNP in 1978 and Salauddin Quader joined the party in the 1990s. He is now a standing committee member of the party.

The cross-examination of Mahbub ended yesterday. The tribunal adjourned the proceedings of the case until September 9.

Salauddin Quader, who is facing 23 specific charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War in 1971, was present in the court yesterday. SAYEED'S WITNESS CROSS-EXAMINED The prosecution yesterday completed cross-examining a witness for war crimes accused Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayeede at Tribunal-1.

During the cross-examination, defence witness Abdur Razzak Akanda said he knew Sayeede from one or two years before the Liberation War.

The tribunal fixed September 9 for the defence to produce their next witness.

Sayeede, who is facing 20 specific charges of crimes against humanity, was not present in the court yesterday.

Following a petition, the tribunal yesterday granted the defence three hours from 10:00am of Monday for privilege communication.

US waterboarded anti-Gaddafi Islamists

AFP, Washington

The United States waterboarded Libyan Islamists opposed to Muammar Gaddafi and handed them over to his regime for further torture during the Bush administration, a rights group said yesterday.

A new report by the New York-based Human Rights Watch said a former detainee claimed to have been waterboarded and another described a form of water torture, indicating wider use of the method than is officially claimed.

"Not only did the US deliver Gaddafi his enemies on a silver platter, but it seems the CIA tortured many of them first," said Laura Pitter, the author of the report.

"The scope of Bush administration abuse appears far broader than previously acknowledged and underscores the importance of opening up a full-scale inquiry into what happened."

The report said a number of members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) -- a movement with alleged links to al-Qaeda which joined the 2011 Nato-backed uprising that overthrew Gaddafi -- were rounded up in several countries in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and held without charge.

Other abuses included being chained to walls for weeks or months, being beaten and slammed into walls and being kept awake for long periods with loud Western music.

The LIFG fought with Nato-backed rebels in last year's uprising and many members now hold key positions in the emerging government and armed forces.

Human Rights Watch said one of the detainees, Khalid al-Sharif, is now head of the Libyan National Guard.

Pak asks Save the Children staff to leave

AFP, Islamabad, Pakistan

Pakistan has ordered all Save the Children's foreign staff to leave the country within four weeks, in the wake of accusations linking the aid agency to a fake vaccination programme used in the hunt for Osama bin Laden.

Save the Children said it had received no explanation for the order, but a Pakistan intelligence report has linked the charity to the Pakistani doctor involved in the fake programme as the US searched for the al-Qaeda chief.

The aid agency's six expatriate staff have been asked to leave within four weeks.

"Earlier this week we got a call from special branch instructing us to send back all expatriate staff," Save the Children spokesman Ghulam Qadir told AFP.

Save the Children denied allegations that it introduced Afridi to the CIA.

Destiny

FROM PAGE 1

In March, the central bank report found that Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative

Society, a sister concern of Destiny Group, as of December 31, 2012 had collected nearly Tk 2,000 crore in deposits and share capital from people. Of the deposit, a bulk amount was lent to its sister organisations while a small portion to its members.

"The Bangladesh Bank report was informative and factual," said the very brief report of the commerce ministry.

Meanwhile, the six-member probe body led by the commerce ministry yesterday was given two more months to prepare a detailed report on the Destiny Group's 34 entities after it had failed to do so in three previous attempts.

The ministry formed the probe body on February 13 to examine whether the company and its subsidiaries function as per the memorandum of articles.

After the first attempt, the committee submitted its report in April, but the commerce ministry had termed it "ridiculous", as it was incomplete.

The ministry sent back the report and gave the committee a second chance. But it failed again. Its third

report, which has been submitted recently, proved to be unacceptable too.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday confirmed the media about the extended time for the probe committee.

"The issue is quite complex and we are trying to investigate comprehensively," Commerce Secretary Ghulam Hussain told journalists yesterday at his office.

"We hope to submit the complete report in two months," he said.

The secretary said the probe committee was investigating all the issues related to the Destiny Group -- from registration of the companies to spending as payment of commission and tax evasion.

Massive irregularities in Destiny prompted different government agencies including the Department of Cooperatives and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to conduct investigations against the group's shadow business in the name of multilevel marketing company and cooperatives.

After getting proof of irregularities, the ACC in August filed two cases against the top brass of the Destiny Group under the Money Laundering Act 2012.

Special drive

FROM PAGE 20

militancy. Police are trying to verify whether they too belong to the group.

Tipped off by the arrestees, a joint force of law enforcers from Cox's Bazar and Bandarban police stations launched a manhunt yesterday to haul up the rest of the gang members of the so-called Jamaatul Arakan.

However, police have so far considered the outfit a relatively small group of militants.

"Of the four outfit members, arrested on Saturday, one by the name of Omar Faruq claimed himself to be the leader of Jamaatul Arakan," Selim Md Jahangir, superintendent of police (SP) of Cox's Bazar, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"One of them is an ex-JMB member while another one a Majlish-e-Shura member of Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami (Huji)," he said, adding "They are now in our remand, and we have gleaned vital information from them."

"We have learnt that this group has been staying in a hideout of Bandarban's remote Ali Kadam area and taking training on philosophy of militancy," the SP said.

But at one point internal conflict broke out among them over some policy issues, and some of them left Ali Kadam, he added.

The Cox's Bazar police chief also said a special joint drive involving policemen from both Cox's Bazar and Bandarban began yesterday to flush out the militants, if there were any, at Ali Kadam in Bandarban.

Quoting the Jamaatul Arakan members, now in police custody, Selim Md Jahangir said they claimed to have launched the militant group in December last year, and so far 40 to 50 people had been enrolled in the outfit.

When asked what prompted the group to choose the nomenclature Arakan that goes by the name of a state in a neighbouring country, the Cox's Bazar police chief said they did not find any direct connection of Rohingya from Arakan with it.

"We are verifying [the information provided by the arrestees]," Selim said, hoping that the picture would become clear if the other militants were arrested.

Police sources confirmed that the four militants, arrested on Saturday, hail from Chapainawabganj, Dinajpur, Mymensingh and Cox's Bazar districts.

There was a Rohingya man among the nine arrestees held on Monday over their alleged involvement in militancy, sources added.

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